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RESPONSIBILITY OF AMERICAN YOUTH.

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A D D R E S S

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

LYCEUM IN PELHAM, N. H.,

DECEMBER 11, 1849.

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BY REV. EDEN B. FOSTER.  
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LOWELL:

A. B. WRIGHT, PRINTER, 55 CENTRAL STREET.

1850.

[COPY OF RECORD.]

At a meeting of the Pelham Lyceum, December 18, 1849,

VOTED, That the Executive Committee request of Rev. E. B. FOSTER, a copy of his eloquent, able, and instructive Address, delivered before the Lyceum on the 11th instant, for publication.

ALEXIS PROCTOR, *Secretary.*

A D D R E S S .

This Lyceum was instituted for the sake of mental and moral culture. We come here to excite one another to thought, and by exchanging our ideas to awaken social sympathy and friendly feeling. By exercising our minds we strengthen them; by imparting our knowledge we increase it. Labor here is not exhaustion but refreshment, giving does not impoverish, but enrich. It is the tendency of the full stream which has been enlarged by nightly dews and summer shows, to pour itself abroad, fertilizing and beautifying the field. It is the tendency of the instructed mind which has seen something of the beauty of truth, and appreciates it, and loves it, to diffuse that truth that others may be blessed by it. We come here that we may excite an enthusiasm in each others minds for noble and improving studies. We come here to increase our acquaintance, our friendship, our fellowship, and to help one another as neighbors are always bound to do. When the sun rises upon us, his rays must necessarily enlighten, and warm, and cheer; so when a magnanimous and generous heart is near, we expect to be exalted by his greatness and benefited by his love. We wrestle not on this field of debate for victory, but for truth—not from emulous rivalry, but from

kindly sympathy. We may be earnest in uttering our thoughts, but we listen with sincere deference to the thoughts of others. We come here, that we may by our presence, and our manifest interest, and our co-operation, excite the youth of this community to earnest efforts after excellence. We would stimulate them to seek for knowledge, for mental growth, for moral principle—for a character wisely formed, strictly upright, truly benevolent, highly religious. This introduces me at once to my subject,—THE RESPONSIBILITY OF AMERICAN YOUTH.

We hear a good deal said at the present—forcibly and justly said—of the mission of the scholar; of the high trust committed to professional men; of parental obligation; of the solemn position of men in public office. All this is right. Let these duties be discussed, and these momentous influences be understood. Let those who occupy these commanding and marked positions weigh well the solemn consequences which will result from their course, and the urgent claims which are made upon them to know and to do their duty. But after all there is another class whose power is as great, and whose responsibilities are as immense as any of those to whom I have referred. They are the youth, the future sovereigns, and, in more senses than one, the sovereigns of our land. Upon their shoulders the burdens of state will soon be rolled. Into their hand the destinies of the land will soon be committed. And all that is precious in freedom, and sacred in law, and lovely in truth, and beautiful in morals, and praiseworthy in philanthropy, and valuable in religion, will depend on their character and course.

It is difficult to over-estimate the future influence of our youth. In a land of Republican institutions, where opinions are free, where the press is unfettered, where knowledge is the universal inheritance, where almost every child can read, where every head of a family takes at least one newspaper, where every individual chooses

his religion according to the dictates of his own conscience, and chooses his profession and place of abode according to the decision of his own judgment; in this land where majorities rule, and the right of suffrage is denied to none, and the path to office is open to all; it is impossible to place any limits to the power which will soon be given up to the present generation of youth. That power will be vast—it cannot be fully anticipated, it cannot be truly measured. It is difficult to anticipate the public influence which will be attained by any one of the children now sporting in our streets, and attracting little notice except for cheerfulness and activity, for sprightliness of imagination and quickness of thought, and bounding life, and overflowing glee. I wish not to excite ambition in any bosom. High office is not the object for which we should strive. High character is the true honor, and not any station or rank. And yet when estimating the future responsibilities of our youth, it is obvious to remark that some of them are likely to become distinguished and influential in public life, and any one of them, if true to himself and his opportunities, may become so. In England it is very rare for a youth born and bred in indigence, and accustomed to manual toil, to come forward into public notice and distinction. Occasionally one whose parentage is obscure, whose youth is depressed, whose culture is wholly obtained by self denial and stern resolution, rises, like Sir Samuel Romilly, to a lofty position of intellectual and social attainment, and of public usefulness. But in this country these cases are not unusual. They are the rule, and not the exception. Washington was a self taught boy, and a self made man. Indeed I know not that any one of our Presidents, with the exception of John Quincy Adams, had any peculiar early advantages, or any excitement to study, or help to improvement except his own irrepressible energies. And how is it with men who have recently been prominent as candidates for the

Presidency—men renowned for their eloquence in Senate halls, their power before judicial tribunals and popular assemblies, their efforts in the cabinet and on the bench? Henry Clay and Lewis Cass, Daniel Webster and Levi Woodbury, Thomas Corwin and John P. Hale, were one and all poor boys, once unknown, with no earnest patrons to urge them and to aid them, no high hopes, no flattering auguries, no ancient family renown to stimulate them; still they have come forward into the nation's eye, and into the world's eye. Breathing the free air of a republic, lifted up by their own innate strength and unwearied application, they stand an encouragement and a sign to other youth who would enlarge the boundaries of their knowledge, and lengthen the cords of their influence. If our granite rocks have produced four of these men, others like them may spring up on the same rugged soil. Or if our State does not raise up men whose names are hereafter connected with the Presidency, (and this is a matter of very little importance,) may we not hope that she will give birth to men whose influence will be widely beneficial, whose names will be renowned for their intelligence and virtues, and whose memories will be blessed? If more than fourteen hundred of the natives of this State, now dwellers in Boston and vicinity, could gather in one company, and make the city and the country ring with their words of power, and send forth, as the result of one evening's fellowship, a volume of nearly 200 octavo pages to instruct the minds, not only of our own citizens, but also of the autocrat of Russia, may we not hope that there is another and far larger company of the same order, only somewhat amended, springing up around our firesides and in our schools?

The future influence of our youth is incalculable. A familiar numerical estimate will help us to approximate to the truth in this matter. Let us apply the rule of permutation that we may gain some idea of the future

influence of one single youth. We may suppose his present influence to extend to at least fifty individuals. Each of those persons acts again upon fifty other individuals; and they again upon others; and thus the influence goes on enlarging in a most rapidly increasing ratio. We may suppose that this influence is communicated from one class of minds to another class, and then to another series, once in twenty years. Here then we have our data—the multiplier is 50, and the increase takes place once every 20 years. In 20 years the youth acts upon fifty minds—upon 2500 minds in 40 years—upon 125,000 minds in 80 years—upon 6,250,000 minds in 160 years—upon 312,500,000 minds in 320 years—that is in 320 years he acts upon a number of minds equal to more than a third the whole population of the globe. Add to this computation that the influence is to be eternal in its duration, as well as inconceivably rapid in its spread, and the amount of responsibility resting upon every youth is absolutely overwhelming. But I wish to consider some particular points, some specific relations, in which the influence of the young will be most decided and significant.

In the first place, *the greatness of their responsibility is seen in the influence they are destined to exert upon other nations.* They are called to act in an age of the world which possesses an unparalleled interest and importance. Never before, probably, were the nations so generally and so profoundly moved by the conflicts of opinion; by the agitation of great questions of civil, social and religious bearing; by the struggles of oppressors and oppressed; the one class to regain their rights, the other to retain their supremacy. All systems, opinions, customs, laws, institutions are thrown into the vortex, and carried around in the whirl. In almost every country of civilized Europe we behold eager controversy, novel and startling doctrines, attempts to overthrow existing forms, and not only the strife of tongues but of arms.

England and Ireland are contending; and it is only the manifest and exceeding weakness of the smaller island which prevents the horrors of civil war. France is engaged in revolutions and intestine strife, and while professing to build up a Republic at home, is pulling down Republics abroad. Austria and Lombardy have met in fierce encounter, until the humble province has been subdued under the mighty central power. The states of Germany have all been in commotion. In most of their great cities the populace have risen upon their oppressors, and the cry for liberty and improvement has been loudly uttered, till now freedom of speech is suppressed. In Hungary the deep desire for freedom has found expression on many a battle field; and there, too, it has met its death, stabbed from behind by treachery, and borne down in front by the combinations of conspiring tyrants, possessing princely revenues, large standing armies, and all the sinews of war. For the present, Liberty is hiding in uncertain refuges, and her voice is silenced, but this is only "the beginning of the end." Thoughts, desires, and resolves, are nourished in those nations, in millions of hearts. Silently they bide their time, and when the day shall come, a day probably not very distant, an explosion will take place which will shake all Europe, and reverberate through the world. Never before, not even in the fifteenth century when the Reformation was stirring up thought and conflict in every civilized country of the old world—not even during the French Revolution of 1792, and the subsequent wars in which Bonaparte occupied so conspicuous a position—has the European world been so widely and intensely roused. And even now the attitude of Russia appears likely to provoke a general war, involving Asiatic as well as European nations in the desperate strife.

We ask for the causes of these agitations, and the answer is obvious. Oppression has long had rule, and exercised her cruelties, to a greater or less extent, in all

those countries. Political wrongs, social inequalities, religious intolerance have been allowed. A pampered court, a privileged nobility, an irresponsible hierarchy have held the reins of power, and have used that power for self aggrandizement, and for public injury. There have been noble hearted men among the higher classes who have sympathized with the lower, and have sought to introduce reforms; but I speak of the general current of thought and course of action among kings and popes, and their trusted officials. But oppression may long exist without waking up a wide-spread and mighty resistance. Those who grind in the prison house of despotism may not understand their rights, may see no probable means of escape, may discern no guiding, cheering, inspiring light shining through the bars of their dungeon. What has awakened thought, and given encouragement and strength to oppressed nations in our day? Plainly, it is our own example as a free, enlightened, and happy people.

Our people have sustained a representative government; and while they have done this they have maintained the supremacy of law, so that no where else have life and property and sacred rights been so secure. They have extended their commerce into every clime, and their sails vex every sea. They have upheld the peaceful arts of industry, and advanced rapidly in population, wealth, and all forms of comfort. They have restrained vice and crime. By a voluntary system never known before, they have sustained schools and colleges, and churches, and advanced the great portion of the people to a point of intelligence, refinement, and religious culture never reached by others. We have peace in our borders, plenty in our gates, harmony in our neighborhoods, love and high intellectual enjoyments in our families. Our country is the sanctuary to which the forlorn and injured, and unhappy of all lands flee—and

here they find an asylum and a home.* Now, our example is the loudest sermon which could possibly be preached in the listening ears of the eager nations. No mighty propagandist,—though he had the zeal of Peter the hermit, and the eloquence of Patrick Henry, and the gift of tongues so as to speak to all tribes of men, and the faculty of ubiquity so that he could address all at once,—could awaken and convince, and convert the nations as our silent example has done. Our influence has been unobserved, and often unacknowledged, but it has been incalculable.

The question now arises, what is necessary to perpetuate and enlarge this influence, and to render it still more beneficial? The destiny of the world seems to hang upon the future character of this republic. If our people advance steadily on, in unbroken phalanx, towards intelligence, and virtue, and love, and peace, the European oppressor, the Asiatic oppressor, the African oppressor are all shorn of their locks, and made weak like other men. Truth is mighty and will prevail. A noble and beautiful example has an energy that is irresistible. If it shall continue to be seen that we can govern ourselves, and still secure all the ends of a just government—that we can maintain a republic, and still remain an enlightened, and harmonious, and generous, and magnanimous people—we shall conquer the world by our moral influence. We shall accomplish vastly more than we could accomplish if we had Bonaparte's army of 500,000 men, with which he entered Russia, and him at the head of it, going forth on a proselyting crusade, with the banner of freedom in our van. We shall exert an influence which all the King's, with all their standing armies, cannot resist. They may marshal and bring forward their troops, armed with mur-

* Of course, I shall not be understood as including in this pleasing description the institution of Slavery, the one, great and mournful anomaly in our system—the exception which casts its baleful shadow upon the rule, and threatens to bring upon it total eclipse.

derous cannon and burnished steel—they may build up fortifications in every city, and range their shotted guns before every harbor—they may expend their millions in subsidizing foreign aid, and in hiring men of genius to write against us, and to speak against us and against freedom—they may incarcerate the free soul and plunge him in deeper dungeons, and draw upon him double bolts—they may join Church and State by closer ties, and hurl the anathemas of a false religion against those who seek for freedom—all will be vain if we adhere steadfastly to our political and religious principles. If our example shall continue pure and true, it will prove itself stronger than all opposition. If our noble institutions shall be preserved, and whatever is inconsistent with freedom and virtue shall be frowned upon and banished, the oppressed of other lands can ask for no higher model, nor more animating motive. Their enfranchisement will then be sure. The day of deliverance to the groaning nation may be somewhat delayed, but it will certainly come.

But if, on the other hand, our example degenerates; then the hopes of the nations die. If we fall back into disorder, disunion, infidelity, violence, crime, then the argument for republicanism fails. The experiment of representative government can never be made under more auspicious circumstances than those in which we have been placed, and if we fail, we may well conclude that no nation can succeed. If we fail, the obvious conclusion of the reigning powers, and of all who possess peculiar political privileges will be, that man cannot govern himself—it is needless to make the attempt, it is impossible for him to be free. It is useless to establish a system of general education; it is false to suppose that the masses can be exalted to comfort and released from grinding toil; it is quixotic to give them the right to think and act for themselves in politics and religion; it is vain and dangerous to open to them the paths of hon-

or and influence; this will be the tyrant's plea. And no answer can be returned to it, except on abstract principles, the great example of freedom having failed. Thus the mouth of every lover of freedom will be closed. The desires of evil men will be enlarged. Darkness will gather again around the waiting and hoping nations, and they will be shut down once more, and we have reason to believe finally and hopelessly, under the hatches of misrule, ignorance and degradation.

Here then comes in the mighty responsibility of the young. It is enough to awaken all their anxieties to know that they will be responsible for the preservation of our own liberties. But a weightier burden than this even, will rest upon them. By their fidelity or their degeneracy they will exert, in all probability, a decisive influence upon the welfare of other nations. Populous kingdoms and mighty empires are waiting, in trembling and in hope, to see what they will do. The fathers are dropping into their graves. The present generation of vigorous, enlightened, patriotic men, is passing off the stage. And what shall be the character and what the purposes of those who are coming forward to guide our destinies, and to act upon the world? It behoves them to ponder the path of their feet, and to consider the train of consequences, wide-reaching, momentous, august, which will follow their action. Surely, if ever a lofty aim and heavenly wisdom were needed, they are needed by our youth.

In the second place, *the responsibilities of our youth assume a singular solemnity when we remember that it will devolve upon them to preserve our institutions and our laws.* Our liberties were bought with blood—the only price at which we can retain them is ceaseless vigilance, self-control, exemplary virtue, obedience to law. That law which God has ordained, which he has revealed in his word, which he has written upon our conscience, which he has made the basis of our social and

civil institutions, which he has appointed as the only preservation of our virtues and our freedom, should be revered by all minds, and hidden in all hearts. It lies low down beneath all outward shows, and it is of the last importance that our people should regard it as their safety and their glory. If the young would comprehend the extent of their privilege, and be prepared to fulfil their duty they must perceive the necessity, the beauty, the *divinity* of a well ordered Government. I say divinity, for government is undeniably a divine institution, and in no possible way can we preserve our mercies unless we maintain the sacredness of Law.

We live in a day and in a land of surprising innovations. Speculations are set afloat of the most latitudinarian character, and pursued with a recklessness of consequences which fills us with astonishment and alarm. The experience of the illustrious and the wise, the lessons of ages pass for nothing. Guesses are substituted for facts. Hopes are deemed more important than reasons. Impulse is wiser than reflection. Intuition is a safer guide than induction. Thus empiricism takes the place of philosophy, and all our privileges and rights are in danger of being given into the hands of rash and blind experimenters. In their view there are no opinions which have been so long tried and fully proved as to be sound; there are no institutions whose benefits have been so great as to place their propriety beyond question; there are no principles which are not to be doubted; there are no arrangements domestic, social, political or religious, which are not to be dissected, disorganized, and overthrown, and made over again. Nothing is too sacred for their profane improvements—nothing is too lovely for their rude touch—nothing is too highly revered, nor deeply prized for its known, accredited and invaluable uses to be ruthlessly assailed by their vandal hand.

It is sad to mark the progress of this spirit. Have we

learned nothing from the long and painful discipline through which the successive generations of men have passed? Nothing, except to doubt, deny, destroy? Are there no truths which are established by the facts and investigations recorded in history? Have the inquiries of scholars after knowledge, and the struggles of men to acquire social, civil and moral blessings been all in vain? Is there no foundation of equity and propriety laid on which we may build and know that we are right? It would seem so from the positions of many of these pseudo reformers. One would suppose that wisdom was born with them, even if it would not die with them, and that until the present favored epoch, though the world had been searched through with candles, a man could not be found. Give to these individuals their wish, and the foundations would soon be out of course—systems and suns would meet in one common crash—confusion and chaos would come again.

If we ask for the origin of these wild speculations and chimerical schemes, it may be found in the vanity of the human mind, and in the pride of the human heart. It may be found in that loftiness of thought which is naturally produced by our independent form of government, and by our rapid growth, as a nation, in wealth and power, and fame. It may be found in the recoil which freedom gives to the mind, when from the oppressions of the old world, and the stagnation of fettered intellect, and the superincumbent weight of a thousand abuses, it rises into the upper air of self-originating, self-moving thought and action. The mind of man is like a pendulum—swing it to one extreme, then give it free course, it will oscillate to the other. Bind the soul in chains—lay on man the burdens of improper restriction and cruel tyranny—then set him free, he is prone to rush into excesses, and revel in licentiousness. Now, we are aware that in this land, free thought, free speech, a free press, and free action are the rule, and restraint

the exception. Here conjecture and experiment have full play. Here the field of adventure and enterprise is boundless. Here, in the material progress of the country, dreams are lost in facts, and reality outruns prophecy. Here, therefore, there is so much to expand the hopes of the sanguine, and to inflate the ambition of the aspiring, that it is not strange perhaps that rash innovations and false reforms should be set in motion.

I have thus described the evil, the inquiry of main importance is, what is the remedy? I believe the most efficient remedy to be found is an increased sense of the sacredness of law. Our youth must understand that there are certain fixed principles. God has appointed for us and disclosed to us certain rules of action which are fundamental, equitable, necessary, abiding. If we undervalue them, we suffer for it. If we disobey them we are ruined. Man must be subordinate to just law. However he may rebel against this subjection, it is his only safety and his only freedom. By this means alone can he ascend to dignity, honor, strength and happiness. He who is guided by impulse is led in devious and dangerous paths. He who is controlled by passion is under the rule of a most inexorable despot. He who acts without reflection acts blindly. And he who imagines that the reasonings and conclusions of other minds cannot instruct him, labors, to say the least, under a great mistake. Scepticism respecting government, and law, and society, is more dangerous in a Republic than in a Monarchy, for the obvious reason that here there are no restraints, if once we break away from the guidance of a sound judgment, and from the control of our own self-appointed institutions. If a majority of our people should conclude that we need no force of law, no legal penalties, no family bonds nor domestic discipline—that we may dispense with all authority and all restraint—what are we then? Evidently in a more unprotected, lawless, alarming state than any tribe of barbarians on

the earth. Something has been established by God, something has been settled by the history and experiences of men, something of decided value in man's social, political and religious condition has been disclosed by time, or reason is all a sham, and the possibility of human greatness and human happiness is all a delusion. The youth, whose opinions and whose character are now forming, will have these disorganizing views to meet. They will be called either to accept or reject them, and to guide their course accordingly, and they need to be prepared for this responsibility.

God has given to us a perfect law, and that law is in the Bible. Here are the fundamental principles which, in their wide application, are pertinent to all interests and all relations. Here are the distinct, significant, emphatic elements of right, which touch all questions of duty. Legislative wisdom, moral science, political economy, ethical rules must be drawn from the Bible, or error pervades all our reasonings, disaster will follow all our decisions. The truths of the Bible are wonderfully comprehensive. They are coincident with all man's obligations. They interpenetrate society, the family, the state, every voluntary association, every political organization with their rectifying, exalting influence. For proof of this, look at the history of Protestant nations in contrast with that of all nations which have rejected the Bible. Compare Scotland with Ireland, England with Spain, the Protestant cities and provinces of Germany and Switzerland with the Catholic—compare Holland with Italy, or the United States of America with the South American Republics—wherever the Bible has been extended and revered, there liberty has flourished. Where conscience has been freed from the thralldom of ages, and the Bible has been given to the common people, and its doctrines and sanctions proclaimed in the ears of rulers and of ruled, there and only there has freedom arisen into life and power. There

education, civilization, the arts, all forms of political good have been advanced. You find that written constitutions, representative governments, judicial trials given into the hands of the people, equal rights, the diffusion of knowledge and of privileges, if, by any chance, they are obtained for a moment, are uncertain and transient possessions where the Bible is not the study of the people, and is not accepted as the rule of faith and practice. The Bible unfolds the true principles of freedom,—it shows their meaning, extent, and application. It is also the source of all just law—it magnifies law and makes known its necessity.

There are two extremes into which men are prone to run in their theories and in their governments—the one is the extreme of bondage, the other is the extreme of anarchy. One man holds to the divine right of kings; another holds that there should be no government at all. One denies the right of private judgment as to all questions of religious duty, tradition and authority are final with him—another claims that his own reason is infallible, his understanding is the only arbiter, he needs not any revelation from God, nor any legislation from man. The Bible holds its steady, benign course between these two extremes. He who follows the Bible will not justify oppression; nor will he maintain the propriety of unloosing all restraints. He will not annihilate human rights; nor will he nullify God's ordinances. God has established in the Bible certain plain appointments. By positive enactment and by indirect recognition he has shown that the State, the Family, the Church, the Ministry, the Sabbath, as well as other ordinances of less importance, are divine Institutions. The reasons for them are laid in his own infinite wisdom, and also in the nature, condition and wants of man. God has adapted these institutions to man's moral, social, and political need. They are so plainly fitted to our constitution, and so obviously necessary, that if we break away from

them, or undervalue them, we bring upon ourselves incurable injury and distress.

When I speak, then of maintaining the sacredness of law, I refer not so much to law *breakers* (for of these every body is afraid, and prisons are regarded as the appropriate place for them) as to law *destroyers*, who are far more insidious and pernicious. Our peculiar danger is, not from overt acts of wickedness, but from undermining sentiments of innovation and change. Infidel doctrines and jacobin theories are silently infused into the minds of our youth. Ridicule, sarcasm, sophistry, rhetoric, declamation are employed to assail institutions which are holy, and venerable, and valuable. These theories fall in but too obviously with the vehement propensities, wayward impulses, hasty thoughts, and crude opinions of many both young and old. Under the loud sounding names of freedom, progress, humanity, equal rights, doctrines are inculcated which strike at all subordination and restraint. The child is to be no longer under tutors and governors. He is his own master, his father is a tyrant, and his mother a tyrant's accomplice. The youth is released from obligations to obey in school, or even to attend school; for learning comes by intuition, genius is a very common gift, and schools are altogether unnecessary in an age of freedom and progress. The child who is unruly at home, and the youth who is fractious at school, becomes idle, and vain, and annoying everywhere else. And when he reaches the point of manhood, what will he do, and what will he be? Of course, he cannot become a conservator of what is lovely and fair in human opinions, and human institutions. He sees not the beauty of them; he understands not the value of them. His tastes, and prejudices, and habits are all opposed to them. He is only fitted to be a destructive. He doubts received opinions. He scorns established rules. He hates irksome restraints. It may be that he has knowledge and tact enough to keep with-

in legal prohibitions, and while he assails important institutions with all the license and vigor of his tongue, while he seeks to overthrow all that keeps vice in check, he may not expose his own reputation to the odium of a prosecution, nor his own person to the requisitions of the sheriff. Still he is in imminent danger of becoming an unblushing, abandoned villain. Law has no influence over him by its beauty, nor by its justice, but simply by its penalty. It is not the restraint of reverence, but of fear. The principles of law he despises. What shall hold him in check, when temptation becomes strong, and opportunity invites, and concealment seems easy? It is because these disorganizing teachings of wily men lead to such results that we ought to regard their influence with alarm, and insist with more earnestness and repetition of argument upon those eternal principles of order and government which God has revealed and enjoined. Let one generation become corrupted by these licentious doctrines, and our liberties are ended—education, refinement, religion, virtue, nobleness have taken their final flight. Let us beware, then, of those teachers who sap the foundations of law, of those sentiments which unloose the passions of men, and prostrate the defences of virtue. If we do not wish to have society dissolved into its original elements—every man thrown upon his own individual strength, his own right of self-defence—let us guard our beloved and well tried institutions. It would not be so difficult a thing, probably, as we imagine to reduce our people to a state of barbarism where the cunning mind, the malignant heart, and the strong hand should triumph over simplicity, weakness, and innocence. We are governed by majorities. Let a fundamental error as to society, or as to government spread through the community—let the young especially be flattered, cajoled, deceived by it—and then as years revolve, as the aged sink like autumn leaves, as the strong minded and pure hearted pass on

into the decline of life, unconscious of their peril, suddenly there starts up a new power, active, determined, remorseless—a power which, like the electric cloud, had been gathering its forces silently and unnoticed, till at an unexpected moment, the thunder bursts, flash upon flash, peal upon peal, bolt upon bolt, swift and unsparing—and law, and truth, and love, and peace, and happiness are all laid low.

Let us venerate the sanctity of law, and mark its lofty seat and its universal reign. Law dwells in the bosom of God—a source of infinite bliss to his own mind, a guide to infinite beneficence in all his moral government. Law binds the stars in their orbits, and keeps them amidst all revolutions, attractions and perturbations, true to their periodic times, and their appointed paths, so that they rush not madly from their spheres into inextricable ruin. Law is the source of method, and beauty, and order, and harmony on this lower earth. Even its inorganic productions are arranged by system, and are obedient to law as the sciences of geology and mineralogy show. Among the vegetable and animal tribes we behold a wonderful regularity, subordination, adaptation—every creature and thing in its order and place, and fulfilling its use, and all obedient to certain fixed and obvious principles of constitution and action. We come to man, and here we find a foundation, and a necessity for law more striking than in all the other creations of God. Man, it is true, is made a creature of free will, so that he can refuse and despise just law, but his whole nature cries out for it. His intellect is thrown into confusion, darkness and imbecility unless he comprehends the system and philosophy of things which is simply the discovery of their laws. His conscience and heart confound all distinctions of right and wrong, and lose all the blessedness of pure love if they have no clear rules of judgment, no proper laws of action. And can it be that God has left us without guidance in our most

solemn and responsible duties? Can it be that in our domestic, civil and religious relations, where our deepest feelings are concerned, and our highest interests involved, and our eternal welfare in peril, we are to be thrown upon impulse, caprice, prejudice and chance? Or has God appointed for us a law, and given us institutions, here as elsewhere, which merit our profoundest gratitude, and which cannot be overthrown without infinite loss? Let our youth then be taught to distinguish between truth and error, and to abide by those opinions which have been proved, by thorough trial, to be sound and wholesome. Let us be watchful of the influences which act upon them. Let them be entreated to guard their minds against all contamination. If subtle and poisonous doctrines are disseminated, let us put forth truth to meet them—in a fair encounter we need not fear for the issue. Let us urge upon their attention the sacredness and the sanctions of law as they are presented in the word of God, and in the works of God, as they are made known in the divine providences, and in the whole experience and history of the human race. Then their minds shall not be bewildered by deceit, their lives shall not be fruitless of good to their friends and their country.

In the third place, *our youth will soon have a vast responsibility devolving upon them in promoting true and enlightened reforms.* God has given to us a perfect law. The principles which he has revealed to us in his word are pure, and just, and beneficent. But those principles as found in human statute books, and applied in human life, are liable to be mingled with error. Whatever passes through the hand of man is touched more or less with imperfection. Nations have not always drawn their laws from the Bible. Even in christian countries legislators sometimes seem to forget that they are amenable to God, and that he has given to them an infallible revelation and guide. How else could

the crime and the blot of Slavery continue as a canker at the nation's heart, eating away its health and vitality? How else could the repudiation of debts, or the pardon of flagitious criminals, or the violation of solemn contracts be justified by deliberate enactment? In former years and in other countries great wrongs have been perpetrated by constituted governments. Even the tortures of the Inquisition, and the assassinations of the French guillotine had this excuse. We need to cherish a deep anxiety lest our legislatures be hasty and prejudiced, lest our executive and judicial officers be partial and unwise. We need carefully to study and watch that the fountains of law may be pure, and that the streams which flow thence may be refreshing. It is important that our hearts be deeply imbued with the spirit of the Bible, that we truly interpret its precepts, and understand its doctrines, that we may thus be prepared rightly to judge of human law.

Let it not be forgotten that as christians we wait and pray for larger improvements than man has yet made. We believe in a progress of the human mind, and an elevation of the human character. Whatever advance has been made upon the darkness of the middle ages, and the usurpations and oppressions of European despots—whatever great truths have been brought to light, and great principles established, and great practical results attained—there is still room for man to grow. We believe that some mistakes still linger, that some inequalities and wrongs are unrepented of. We anticipate the removal of some further clouds from the human mind, and some additional veils from the human heart, so that man will yet see more beauty in truth, and feel more power in religion. We anticipate the time when a higher point of individual excellence will be reached, even in our own happy Republic—when ignorance will depart, and passion be suppressed, and vice be abhorred—and when our government and laws will be distin-

guished by a more perfect equity and a more lofty wisdom. All this we anticipate. But we do not anticipate this result by means of harsh denunciation and unsparing destruction. We would not assail great principles ; we would not undermine foundations on which our happiness and our hopes are laid. While we desire to see errors rectified, we desire also to cultivate a temper of subordination to law, and a life of self-restraint. For evils in a government like ours there are constitutional modes of redress. We may not proceed with violence and without discrimination to destroy. We may not tear away trunk and fruit, root and branch because there is a withered and barren limb upon the tree, but rather prune away the evil and leave the good. We do not expect advancement by blindly rejecting the progress which has been made ; by trampling on laws which have been improved ; by scorning the wisdom of those who have lived before us. Progress is made by accepting the attainments of other men, starting at the point where they leave off, and then moving on. If we blindly and recklessly destroy what they have done, that is not progress but retrogression. At one fell resolve we place ourselves far back in the dimness of the past—in the unspiritual, passionate darkness of the infancy of society. Such a reformer has a long way to travel before he comes up with the present even ; and in all probability he will die far behind his own age. Here is a point where the young need to be cautioned. They are in danger of undue self confidence. They are apt to be too sanguine of their ability to accomplish reforms where others have failed. They are not fully aware of the difficulties before them ; of the vast fields of knowledge around them ; of the mighty labors requisite to change the face of society ; and to abolish the errors and sins of men ; and of the means necessary to secure this magnificent result. They are not fully aware of the anxieties which have been felt, and the efforts which have been

made, by thoughtful, praying, humane men, for the removal of abuses. Let them cultivate a subdued and meditative spirit. Let them ask God for meekness and wisdom. Let them seek to blend together in all their doctrines and life a reverence for what God has ordained, and what man has well accomplished, with a desire to amend what man has left deficient.

Unquestionably, there are some reforms which must be secured, or our perils will multiply, and some great catastrophe is near. The position of our country is peculiar. Clouds appear to be gathering over us thick, and dark, and ominous. I sincerely believe that we are approaching a crisis, and that we are on the verge of more startling events than have happened before in the history of our confederacy. The storm has been muttering in the distance for a long time, but the acquisition of a vast extent of free territory has precipitated events. I know that the cry of a crisis, a crisis, is often raised by those who are strenuous for particular views. I do not wish to mistake the signs of the times. I find no pleasure in prognosticating evil. I would not be an alarmist or a croaker. And yet if danger is at hand, if infinite hazards are lurking in ambush—it is the part of wisdom to discover them and guard against them. “Fore warned is fore armed.” We seem to be in special and imminent danger from the claims and aggressions of Slavery. This question is rousing up a spirit of anger, and wilfulness, and recklessness which portends speedy and appalling evils. I look for a strenuous and alarming effort at disunion, favored by men of extreme opinions both at the South and at the North. Such an attempt, I believe, will be widely disastrous. Such a measure, if accomplished, I doubt not would lead to civil war and bloodshed; and would put back our advancing strength and honor at least a century, if not for all time. The perpetual union of these States is a consummation for which every patriot must seek, for which

every philanthropist and Christian must pray. Our country is larger than all Europe, and if we are broken up into separate provinces, or kingdoms, or republics, call them what you will, the history of European conflicts, fierce, sanguinary, fratricidal, interminable, dreadful, will be repeated. The interests of different sections of the country will then become truly antagonistical. Passions will be roused to the highest pitch. Revenges will be allowed free course. And desolation, murder, and misery will hold their revel on our soil. I cannot look forward to disunion without forebodings and quakings of heart as an event destructive to the hopes of this people.

Still I believe we have a great duty to perform with regard to Slavery. If disunion would destroy us on the one hand, continued oppression will destroy us on the other. I do not justify any indiscriminate denunciation or exasperating reproofs on the part of Northern men. Words of gentleness, fraternal beseechings, argument, and truth and love are infinitely more appropriate, and more efficacious than bitterness, and invective, and scorn. We are brothers, and as brothers we must calmly discuss our differences, and make our final appeal to the constitutional authorities, and by the decisions of our legal assemblies abide, or we are lost. While I thus disapprove of all rash and unsparing severity, I disapprove with equal decision of extending Slavery into free territories. This is a sin and oppression for which there can be no excuse. To keep our territories free, and to secure their freedom by express Congressional enactment can inflict no injury upon the Slave States—can infringe no constitutions—can break no compacts—can invade no rights—can perpetrate no moral or social wrong. But to admit the laws of human bondage to enter upon that wide expanse of unoccupied land, and to stretch their leaden sceptre over the faculties and hopes of unborn millions would be a social and a moral

wrong of inconceivable magnitude. It would be an offence against all true principles of political economy. It would be an appalling trespass upon the rights of man. It would be a grievous sin against those eternal laws of humanity and of duty which cannot be disregarded by individuals or by nations without debasement of heart and remediless loss. It would be a crime against God which would provoke his speedy judgments. There are questions which sometimes occur in the history of nations, and in the course of statesmanship and politics, which ascend far above the usual platform of legal debates, and are to be settled not by principles of expediency, but of conscience. They rest for their decision upon the great foundations of religious duty. The claims of God, of the soul, of eternity come distinctly into view. It is a question, not of profit and loss, but of moral right, and moral wrong. It tests a man's fidelity to immutable, religious principle. The question of extending Slavery I consider most clearly and emphatically one of this kind. And the generation now coming on to the stage of action, in connection with those now upon it, will have this question to determine.

I may be permitted here to remark that, for their guidance in these emergencies—for the settlement of every difficult question, and for the fulfilment of all their high responsibilities—our youth will need nothing so much as *a religious faith*. A doubting and derisive spirit is abroad in the land, making its appeals to the young with subtle deceits, and with varied and powerful enticements. This is the natural result of our advancement in science, and art, and enterprise, in wealth, and power, and fame. Prosperity is far more dangerous to a nation than adversity. As wealth increases, luxury comes in. As power and fame are acquired, pride of heart is engendered. Simple tastes and modest desires are forgotten, ambition takes possession of the general mind, the quiet arts of peace and industry are despised, and more brilliant and

dazzling exploits, which shall shine in the public eye, are coveted. As science is perfected, and philosophy enlarges its range, and new manifestations of genius and mental power are exhibited, scepticism becomes more prevalent and more bold. This may seem a strange result—and it is a strange result—but this is the tendency of human nature. Learning, and philosophy and the gifts of eloquence, and poetry, and invention, are apt to elate the mind and render man self-confident, presumptuous, unbelieving. In different quarters, and arising from different causes, we find the indications of scepticism and of scornful pride. We cannot doubt that if this spirit increases and prevails, especially if it gains extensive influence over the minds of the rising generation, it will work our ruin. France is pervaded with infidelity, but France cannot maintain a republic. What they need there is more religious fear, a more enlightened regard to the Word and the government of God. Germany is intensely rationalistic—incredulous of divine teachings—boastingly confident in reason. But Germany is still bound in civil chains. She has sighed and struggled for political liberty, but in vain. Her philosophy does not give her freedom. It is in fact her self-complacent, self-exalting, infidel philosophy, which prevents her from attaining freedom. The Pilgrim Fathers sighed and struggled for freedom, and they gained what they sought because they were men of faith. This imparted to them energy, wisdom, fortitude, and perseverance. It taught them on what principles to found, and by what means to preserve, their liberties. They had, indeed, as much learning and as much mental activity as any of the doubters of our times, whether in America, or France, or Germany. They loved independent thought and action quite as well. They had a mind and conscience as untrammelled, and enlightened, and vigorous. But there was one place where they bowed the knee and the will, and that was before God. There

was one authority which they consulted with docility, and that was the Bible. There was one possession whose value they had proved, and found it above all price, and that was religion. They revered the Bible, not because they were ignorant of the foundations of evidence, and of its laws, but because they had brought the claims of Scripture to the rigid scrutiny of reason, and upon the basis which reason had laid they built their faith. Their religion was not fanaticism—it was not mysticism. They had a clear and consistent philosophy. They could give an explanation of their views, and assign a satisfactory cause for their belief. They received the revelation of God because they had examined it, and as spiritual, immortal, and sinful men had felt their need of it.

A Puritan faith is appropriate to our times. It is peculiarly needful that the minds of the young should be steadied and stimulated by this religious sentiment. It is a sentiment rational, profound, controlling. We can see the effect of this faith in the sacrifices and toils and tears of those noble and sublime men, who built up here the empire of freedom. They laid the foundation of our liberties in prayer, and in the strength of religious principle. To them truth was more valuable than aught else. Their faith was stronger than the persecutor's arm.—They felt that they could not be poor or wretched if they had an approving conscience. They went forward through darkness and distress, hesitating not to yield their life rather than their convictions. They faltered not when freedom was to be bought at the price of blood, because they believed in the word of the living God. In the temptations which multiply around us, in the gathering darkness of coming times, our youth will need the same holy and self-subduing sentiment for their strength and defence.

I have not been careful, in this address, to speak of the private and more limited responsibilities of the

young. I have sought to take a wider view, and to bring up public relations and obligations. I have desired to appeal to patriotic feeling, and to awaken a sense of each one's duties, as a member of a republic, and as living in critical times. There are solemn responsibilities on which I might enlarge, which relate to the personal duties and domestic relations of the young. They relate to the love, and the truth, and the generosity, and the self-denial which should be seen and known in the family. They relate to high, moral integrity, and uncompromising virtue. They relate to the improvement of time, and the choice of studies. They relate to the salvation of the soul. But passing by all these points, I wish to speak, in closing, of one duty which is specially binding upon the young, if they would fit themselves for their more public—and if they choose so to consider it—more august responsibilities. Their minds should be impressed with the necessity of mental culture, and of earnest, prolonged application.

The entire advancement of the youth depends on his *power of application*. An earnest, diligent, resolute student, will make anything of himself that he chooses.—He may be compelled to work all day in dust, and cinders, and soot, like Elihu Burritt, but he will wash off the soot at night, and then apply himself to study, and the glow of his mind will be brighter than the sparks on his anvil. He may be obliged, like Gifford, to write out his mental operations, with an awl, on shoeleather, but those thoughts are almost certain to be instinct with truth, and they will soon be graven on the hearts of men. Nothing can repress the energies of such a scholar; and nothing can be a substitute for diligent, persevering application. Genius, so called, without application, is but a flashy, transient, uncertain possession.—The knowledge of man is not intuitive. High talent and mental power do not come without study. It is necessary, if we would have an efficient intellect, that

we be able to command our attention; to direct it fixedly to any particular subject; to pursue a connected train of thought; and to reason from obvious and acknowledged premises to unforeseen conclusions. It is this power of fixed attention, of logical thought, of continued and consecutive study, which chiefly distinguishes the great mind. No doubt some intellects have more quickness of thought and readiness of perception than others. It would seem as if the germs and elements of genius must be hidden in the mind of such a child or youth—as if the results of talent must there be developed. But how often are the fond hopes of friends, with regard to such a mind, and the vain conceits of the individual himself disappointed—not because the youth was destitute of talent, but because he did not rightly improve it, he lacked the power of application. A brilliant wit does not constitute a mighty intellect. An easy and rapid memory does not make an instructed and strong-minded man. Our faculties of mind, however active they may be, are worth but little, and will accomplish but little, unless they are accustomed to labor, and are disciplined by close and continued thought. Do we see a youth who loves study—who is given to reflection—who can take a book and read it through, and then read it through again—who can take a subject and ponder upon it, till he is sure he has some ideas of his own about it—we may be assured that intellect and genius are there maturing. Those who do not understand such a youth, may say that he is a dull, stupid fellow; that he don't know how to laugh, nor how to play; that he sits moping in a corner, and mumbling over a book; and that he has none of the lively, showy, practical energy, that makes a smart, young man. But wait some twenty years, till the mind has had time to grow, and till the man has been called upon to act his part, not among boys but among men, in the mighty contests of opinion, and under the solemn responsibilities of practical duty,

and then see who has the knowledge and solidity, the compass, correctness, and depth, and power. Wherever the youth is found who loves to think, and who has the power of application—of an indomitable perseverance in the pursuit of knowledge—we may safely anticipate that ere long he will become an accomplished and efficient man. Impart to that youth a sound judgment to guide him in the use of his gifts, and religious principle as the foundation of his attainments, and he is certain to become not only a good man, but a man of large capacity, of influence, and of usefulness. Says Dr. Wayland, “Difference of success in this world is rarely the result of external circumstances, and is by no means always the result of extraordinary intellectual endowment. It is more commonly the result of strong determination than of anything else. Circumstances cannot create power. Talent may be neglected or misdirected; but a strong and determined will clears away difficulties, extracts good out of evil, makes even obstacles conduce to success, enlarges and develops mind, and creates the means for the accomplishment of its own purposes.—Nothing is denied to a resolute will.” It is my hope that many a youth of this community will understand the extent of his responsibilities to his country and his God—will avail himself of his privileges—will apply himself with an inflexible purpose to study—will adopt high, moral sentiments for his guidance—will comprehend the true aims of life—and, trusting in an Almighty Helper, will make of himself an honorable and useful member of society.

